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ABSTRACT

Not only is the child's perspective of his parents and their occupation influential in his career choice, but the parents' perspective of themselves can also be important in shaping the child's occupational desires. College students (N=93) completed questionnaires to determine the most influential factors on their career choices, and to ascertain whether they were vocationally decided or undecided in terms of their immediate and long-range plans. Results indicated that the parents had the most influence on their offsprings' career selections. Teachers comprised the second most influential source. There was no significant difference between decided and undecided students on the amount of parental occupational influence. Findings suggest that parents themselves--not the nature of their work--are influential in shaping their child's career choice. These findings are attributed in part to contemporary social movements and their influence on youth's vocational outlook. (Author/NRB)

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The Influence of Parent's Occupation on the Career Choice of Vocationally Undecided Youth

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The Influence of Parent's Occupation on the Career Choice of Vocationally Undecided Youth

Early work on parental influence and career choice has been done by Nelson (1939), Jenson and Kirchner (1955), and Peters (1941). These researchers found that in general children choose their parent's occupation. This finding is due to the general belief that the environment has a strong influence on the selection of a vocation.

More recent studies on parental occupational influence have focused on the attractive features of the parent's occupation as viewed from the child's perspective. Research produced by Creason and Schilson (1970) investigated sixth-grade children in order to determine whether they were interested in an occupation of the same level as that of their father. Results of their study signified that children who viewed their fathers as being low in occupational prestige indicated a preference for an occupation with prestige and recognition.

However, Dee Burlin (1976) did not find lower occupational level families producing children motivated to attaining higher occupational levels. Having not found any significant association evident, she speculates that perhaps the father's socioeconomic status rather than his educational level may have a stronger influence on the child's career aspirations.

Not only is the child's perspective of his parents and their occupation influential in his career choice, but the parent's

perspective of themselves can also be important in shaping the child's occupational desires.

Kahl (1953) investigated the career aspirations of "average middle-class working people " (p.189), and found that the parent's self-perception was very influential in shaping their son's occupational perspective. Parents who were discontented with their own way of life, "tended to train their sons from the earliest years of grammar school to take school seriously" (p.203). Those families who were content did not feel a strong need to influence their son into the pursuit of higher socioeconomic class status.

Attitudinal constraints regarding traditional male and female sex roles, have theoretically limited the applicability of most of the research addressed to parental influence on the child's vocational outlook. Studies by Creason and Schilson (1970) and Dee Burlin (1976), are limited to the influence of the father's vocation on his children. This nontheless biases the consideration given to parental occupational influence, as the mother's occupation and her influence on the child are rarely considered.

The present study was designed to examine vocationally uncertain university students. On working with vocationally indecisive youth, it appears that both parents are very influential. It has been observed that most students who present themselves for vocational counseling and who express dissatisfaction and / or lack of personal fulfillment with their present course of study, are usually enrolled in a program of studies which represents one of their parent's occupations.

In most cases they do not know which major subject to select, and after a few years of study in a chosen field, they are faced with the same indecisiveness.

It is hypothesized that students who are vocationally indecisive are more likely to pursue studies in the occupational area of one of their parents than students who have no apparent difficulty in making vocational decisions.

The purpose of this research is to study career choice from the point of view of parental influence. The intent is to determine how much parental occupation is reflected in; (a) youth who cannot decide on an occupation, and (b) youth who can decide on an occupation.

The variables to be considered are; influential factors on the student's vocational choice, their present field of study, their father's and mother's present occupation, occupational stability of their parents, and whether the child was reared with both parents present in the home. In addition to measuring parental influence by a questionnaire, it is also intended to determine parental occupational influence. Therefore parental input will be studied on these two levels.

Method

Subjects. One hundred and eight Mc Gill University male and female students were selected. The main prerequisite in selecting the sample was that they presently be students between the ages of 16 and 30. Students were drawn from two sources on the Mc Gill campus, the Mc Gill Counseling Service (41 who were personal clients of this author) and the Mclennan Library (52 students randomly selected). Nine students were not considered, as they did not come

from socially intact homes; i.e. they responded 'no' to the question 'did you grow up with both your parents present in the home?' If one parent was absent from the home this may affect the child's relationship with the remaining parent, and the desire was to maintain consistency within the sample. Also, six students were eliminated from the study as they simultaneously responded as committed and uncertain on the two part questionnaire measuring decidedness and undecidedness.

The 93 students were divided into 4 groups. Thirty-two students formed the group who were undecided and influenced by their parents. Twenty-one students formed the group who were undecided and influenced by other sources. Fifteen students comprised the decided students influenced by parents, and 25 decided subjects were influenced by other sources.

Instrumentation. The first questionnaire adminstered was selected in order to measure first and second most influential vocational factors.

Insert Table I about here

Questions I to I2 were adopted from Peters (I94I), with the exception of the last item (number I3) which was an addition made by this researcher. Results were determined by tallying a factor frequency and per cent in order to discover the most frequently chosen items.

The second part of this questionnaire was produced by this researcher. Student's subject of study was questioned in order to examine its relatedness with parent's occupation. The results of this latter half

of the questionnaire were determined through a chi square analysis testing the significance of the difference between porportions. The intent of the first portion of the questionnaire was to determine the degree of parental influence, whereas the latter half was constructed to investigate degree of parental occupational influence. Responses indicating the same subject of study as that of one of their parent's occupations were totalled. Results were then compiled in a chi square 2× 2 factor design for independence.

Occupational stability was considered a factor, as this may be influential on the offspring's vocational certainty. The last question regarding parental presence in the home was posed, as the intent was to study only subjects with both parents in order to measure parental influence under normal conditions.

The second questionnaire adminstered was used by Hecklinger (1972) in his study on the vocationally undecided student. This questionnaire was used to categorize students as decided or undecided. No items were changed. A student's decisiveness was determined by responses such as definitely or fairly committed to a vocational plan (selected items I and 2 on both sets of questions). Those who responded as rather uncertain or undecided, circled items 3,4,and 5 on both groups of questions. Six subjects who did not indicate response consistency were eliminated from the study, as they were unclassifiable.

Procedure. Each subject individually received the two page questionnair They were asked whether they had a few minutes and would mind completing it. If its purpose was questioned by the student, it was stated "for personal research purposes." Subjects were approached over a two

month period, February and March, therefore it is assumed that there was very little variation over time.

Students who indicated as their first choice that their parents were most influential in their selection of a vocation (first questionnaire) and who selected responses 3,4,or 5 (second questionnaire) formed group I - influenced by parents and undecided. Students who chose any of the I3 responses other than their parent as their first choice and responded by circling 3,4, or 5 which indicated indecision, formed group 2 - influenced by other sources but undecided. Subjects indicating parents as influential as their first choice, and circling responses I or 2 which indicates decidedness, comprised group 3 - influenced by parents and decided. Finally, respondents indicating any of the I3 responses other than parent as their first choice, and selecting responses I or 2, formed group 4 - influenced by other sources and decided.

Results. The results indicate that the parents are the most influential sources on their offspring's career selection. The second most influential source is teachers. In the category 'other' students indicated various influences such as previous employment, nature of the occupation i.e., it provided the opportunity for self-expression, and they frequently answered that they chose their field of study due to interest.

The results of Hecklinger's questionnaire in which the intent was to differentiate the decided from the undecided students, categorized 53 students undecided and 40 as decided. Student's responses were then analyzed and assigned to one of 4 groups.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 represents chi square calculation for 4 independent samples with I df resulting in a figure of 4.70 which is significant at better than the .05 level. Thus the data provides fairly conclusive evidence that the sources of influence differentiates individuals on the basis of being decided or undecided, indicating significant parental influence among undecided students.

Analysis of the frequency of responses of the number of students indicating a field of study similar to the occupation of one of their parents was calculated using chi square. For I df chi square = I.50, indicating no significant difference at the .05 level. Thus it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between decided and undecided students on amount of parental occupational influence. These results do not support the hypothesis that parent's occupation is influential in determining their child's career choice. The results however, support previous research in that parents are influential in shaping their child's vocational selection.

Discussion

Several considerations should be made in interpreting the results of this study. First, the fact that the sample studied only university students and not college bound students must be considered. The university student may have more knowledge of available options,(this may also be a problem, as when there are too many preferences it becomes more difficult to choose) than do high school students. This implies that the university student's indecisiveness may be due to

different reasons than a student who has not yet reached this level.

Often, it has been encountered that students will say "well I knew I wanted to go to university because I wanted an education." When students are in doubt about their career, choosing to enroll in university may be appealing. This type of student may feel that an education is a good foundation. Operating here are the factors of convenience, university accessibility, and facility in learning about the programs offered. It may be difficult to enter a particular profession simply because of lack of knowledge about pursuing it.

A second very influential effect on this research is contemporary society. Previously, males would identify with their father's occupation and females with their mother because they were reared by very strict sex role stereotypes. Contemporary social influences such as women's liberation and the desire for equalization of opportunity for males and females, is affecting youth's career outlook.

Research during the 1940's, 50's, and 60's focused on parental influence on the child's occupational choice, and basically found a significant correlation between offspring's choice and that of their parents. However, youth no longer appear to be influenced by their parent's occupation. Thus, a psychoanalytic approach of parental identification, prevalent in the early half of the century, has shifted to a social theory of identification. The child's occupational choice may very well depend on the publicity and favourableness attached to a powerful, aspiring, professional, as opposed to an oppressed, traditional worker.

On counseling students, one should bear in mind that not only have the social influences on career choice been magnitudinal, but it nonetheless has affected job availability. As employment and educational opportunities become more competitive, there will be an increase in the number of undecided college students. Technological advancement, innovative manpower, and society's changing perspective regarding sex-role stereotyping, no longer makes the parent's occupational attainments as influential as they once were.

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Table I

Indicate by marking I and 2 beside the first and second factors below which influenced you most in selecting the vocation you desire to enter.

I. Relative other than parent.....

2. Parent.....

3. Teacher.....

4. Friend.....

5. Advertisements.....

6. Social recognition of the vocation.....

7. Professional acquaintances.....

8. Opportunity for study.....

9. Result of vocational guidance tests.....

IO. Result of hobbies.....

II. Opportunity for advancement.....

I2. Opportunity for quick employment.....

I3. Other (please explain).....

Age.....

Subject of study.....

Father's occupation.....

Mother's occupation.....

Male.....Female.....(check one)

Does your father/mother have the same occupation now as they did when you were a child? Yes.....No.....

Factors which influenced university students in their selection of a vocation. Peters,E. Factors which contribute to youth's vocational choice. Journal of Applied Psychology, I94I, 25, 428-430.

Table 2

Chi square analysis testing the significance of the difference between undecided and decided students on porportions of parental influence and other influential sources.

Parental influence	32	I5	47
Other sources	2I	25	46

Results; χ^2 = 4.70 for I df, significant at > .05 level.